

It's the holiday season. Presents of all shapes and sizes line the walls. Two Christmas trees adorned with festive lights and ornaments decorate the room as traditional holiday music plays over the speakers. Children excitedly play with their new toys and get their photos taken with Santa Claus.

Next door, Santa's helpers prepare to move gifts that will be waiting for the older children when they get back from school. This was the scene at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) on December 11, 2012 during the St. Ann's Giving Tree Christmas Party.

Throughout the month leading up to the event, students and faculty at DINFOS picked gift suggestions off of "giving trees" placed around the school to give to the children of St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families. On the December 11, the children of St. Ann's who were not in school came out to visit DINFOS and received their gifts during the annual Christmas party.

"We really appreciate what DINFOS does for the kids every year", said Sister Mary Bader, the CEO of St. Ann's. "It lets them know that people outside of St. Ann's really do care for them".

St. Ann's was founded as an orphanage in 1860 and was officially chartered by President Lincoln in 1863, said Bader. She said that St. Ann's provides care for children as well as pregnant women in need of care. They provide social services and mental health care as well as education up to high school.

DINFOS has been involved with St. Ann's for twelve years. Each year, the students and staff here donate gifts to the children based on the tags placed on the giving trees around campus, said Air Force Tech. Sgt. Kathy Parker, the coordinator for the event. They donate clothing, toys, and other things the children can use.

In addition to the 22 children that received gifts this year, gifts were also donated for three unborn children as well as 16 mothers who receive services from St. Ann's.

"This event is one of the ways that DINFOS gives back to the community", said Parker. "We had more than 350 tags on our trees, and they were all gone by then end. We received more than 600 items in donations this year".

In addition to those who donate gifts, DINFOS staff also volunteer for the annual Christmas party.

Michael Gannon, the DINFOS provost, reprises his role of jolly old St. Nick every year and entertains the kids as they open their gifts. Several civilian members of the DINFOS staff worked on loading gifts to take to the children at St. Ann's alongside Santa's helpers, three students from the Army detachment. Ms. Sharon Lettner, a DINFOS instructor, painted faces at the event, and Army Staff Sgt. Katie Smith read Christmas stories.

"It's incredible how big the hearts are just within the walls of DINFOS", said Parker. "It's amazing to see the amount of time spent and the amount of donations given at this event. Even those who couldn't donate monetarily were willing to help out with putting everything together."

With Christmas just around the corner, the DINFOS family was able to celebrate yet another holiday season with the children of St. Ann's. The annual event helps spread holiday cheer to the children and to all of the members of DINFOS as well.